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NEWS BRIEFING

ASSISTANT SECRETARY ARTHUR SYLVESTER

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The Pentagon

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12:00 NOON

October 26, 1962

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MR SYLVESTER: Ladies and gentlemen, let me again read this through once. Then we will go into any details if you will be so kind.

The Navy has received from the scene of the boarding party the following report and I quote it:

"Boarding party returned 09:20R, (10:20 a.m., EDT). No incidents. No prohibited material in evidence. All papers in order. Obtained copy of manifest. Cargo, 12 trucks deck loaded. All holds loaded to capacity. No passengers. MARUCLA cleared to proceed, course 260, speed 9 knots to Havana by Providence Channel. Maintaining surveillance."

End of boarding party report.

Two-six-zero is ten degrees south of west. The USS destroyer JOHN R. PIERCE at about 2:00 p.m. yesterday afternoon, set out to intercept the MARUCLA. She was assisted by S2F tracker aircraft. The PIERCE made contact with the MARUCLA after dark at about 10:30 p.m. last night, (EDT). Sometime after midnight the PIERCE was joined by the destroyer JOSEPH F. KENNEDY.

During the remaining hours of darkness the MARUCLA held to a west-southwesterly course, making 12 knots. She had previously informed the PIERCE that she carried a cargo of "sulphur, paper rolls, and parts for trucks and garages." Both ships trailed the MARUCLA at about two miles distance with orders to stop her and board her at "first light".

It had been expected that would be about 7:00 a.m., (EDT) today. The KENNEDY flag ship of destroyer division 102, is the senior ship and was, therefore, designated to provide the boarding party. The weather was fair and cool. At 7:50 the KENNEDY pulled along side and signalled the MARUCLA to stop in order to receive a boarding officer, simultaneously placing her armed boarding party in a boat.

In addition to the information about the MARUCLA, which I gave you earlier, namely, her tonnage, length, width and draft, Lloyd's says also that the MARUCLA was named BEN H. MILLER from 1943 to 1947. Lloyd's Registry reports also that from 1949 to 1959 she was called CITY OF SHREWSBURY. According to the Lloyd's, the MARUCLA is now owned by Marcou & Sons of London, Emmanuel Marcou, President.

QUESTION: Any information on where she was built?

MR. SYLVESTER: Built in 1943 by Bethlehem-Fairchild according to Lloyd's. She was one of the so-called Liberty ships.

QUESTION: Built where?

MR. SYLVESTER: By Bethlehem-Fairchild according to Lloyd's.

QUESTION: In the United States? Are you finished?

MR. SYLVESTER: I am finished.

QUESTION: Will you tell us how many people were in that boarding party?

MR. SYLVESTER: I haven't that detail yet. I will attempt to get it.

QUESTION: Have you any details about the conversation between the boarding party:

MR. SYLVESTER: I have given you every bit up to date.

QUESTION: Are you going to try to get that for us?

MR. SYLVESTER: Definitely.

QUESTION: Are there any other interceptions?

MR. SYLVESTER: I will have to check. This is the main one I am aware of. I will have to check.

QUESTION: Have you any explanation for the fact that the afternoon paper today pretty early reported what you have just given us in two reports during the course of the entire morning?

MR. SYLVESTER: I cannot imagine, Jack. I couldn't imagine any civilian personnel in the Defense Department issuing that. I know nobody in the Navy did because it would endanger their own people. I don't know more than that.

QUESTION: You said here the ship was instructed to intercept at light. What level did that instruction come from?

MR. SYLVESTER: It is my understanding that the instructions are going constantly from Admiral Dennison, CINCLANT, throughout this operation. He is in constant communication with Admiral Anderson who is the JCS executive officer running the show.

QUESTION: You have been talking today about 25 Soviet ships. Does that include this type of Soviet controlled ship? Did you include in that number Soviet controlled ships such as this one? Would you regard this as a Soviet ship?

MR. SYLVESTER: I think the answer to that would be that this is under Soviet charter.

QUESTION: In other words, we are to assume that this is one of the 25 that we were referred to the other night?

MR. SYLVESTER: I can't be precisely sure whether it was one of the 25. It is certainly one of those we speak of as the Soviet ship, under Soviet charter. I would not, in my own mind, and I would not urge you to stay with 25 as a fixed number. That is what we knew at the time. There are 2,000

ships in the area daily. That could be added to or subtracted from daily. At the time Mr. McNamara used that figure, that was the best figure that the Navy had to give him.

QUESTION: Can you give us the best figure the Navy has to give us now on the number of ships of that nature?

MR. SYLVESTER: I'll try to get it. I do not know.

QUESTION: Do you know the nationality of the MARUCLA?

MR. SYLVESTER: No, we will have to find that out if we can.

QUESTION: Did the 25 ships mentioned by the Secretary include non-bloc ships?

MR. SYLVESTER: My recollection of the statement is he said there were 25 Soviet ships.

QUESTION: Now you left it a little fuzzy though. You called this one under Soviet control. That is the point of my question.

MR. SYLVESTER: I said this one is a Soviet chartered Lebanese freighter.

QUESTION: You said it was under control. Can you be a little more precise as to whether that 25 figure did include Soviet chartered ships as well as Soviet register?

MR. SYLVESTER: I do not know. I will attempt to find out.

QUESTION: Can you tell us are these ships being hailed by radios, semaphore or light?

MR. SYLVESTER: My understanding is that any method necessary is being used. Admiral?

ADMIRAL McCAIN: That is right. Generally speaking, at sea, from experience myself, it is generally by blinker light.

QUESTION: Do you have anything that indicates the name of the skipper of the MARUCLA?

MR. SYLVESTER: Not at this time.

QUESTION: Do we have the nationality of the ships' officers? Were they British? The ship is out of London?

MR. SYLVESTER: I didn't mention any out of London that I know of.

QUESTION: Is it registered in London?

MR. SYLVESTER: I only know what the Lloyd's record show. The Admiral points out to me that Lloyd's may be behind the times. We have just given what the present Lloyd's registry reports.

QUESTION: Do you know the edition of Lloyd's?

ADMIRAL McCAIN: No, but I can find out for you.

QUESTION: Did the MARUCLA halt after being hailed by a blinker light? Is that the way it was stopped? Did it respond to a blinker light?

MR. SYLVESTER: I don't have the precise information but we will try to find out.

QUESTION: The thing I don't understand is that you apparently gave us this information almost immediately after you got it and yet you apparently got it a hell of a lot later than the people did who put that story in the newspapers this morning.

MR. SYLVESTER: No comment.

QUESTION: Are the messages between the United States ships and headquarters going back and forth in clear or in code?

MR. SYLVESTER: I am not at liberty to tell how we communicate.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

EXTRACT FOLLOWS

NEWS RELEASE
PLEASE NOTE DATE



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
Washington 25, D. C.

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OCTOBER 26, 1962

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FOR THE PRESS

Announcement by Secretary Sylvester:

The Navy here has received from the scene of the boarding party the following report.

"Boarding party returned 0920R (10:20 AM EDT). No incidents.

No prohibited material in evidence. All papers in order.

Obtained copy of manifest. Cargo 12 trucks deck loaded. All

holds loaded to capacity. No passengers. MARUCLA cleared to

proceed course 260, speed 9 knots to Havana via Providence Channel.

Maintaining surveillance."

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